

Indian River Lagoon

What is the status of the Indian River Lagoon South (IRL) report-why has the Corps not yet completed its review?

We fully understand the frustration in the delay on the review of this report. The Army, Corps and South Florida Water Management District are all working hard to obtain all the information needed to make a final recommendation on the IRL to the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) for review within the Administration and submission to the Congress. We do not have it yet.

To make that recommendation, we must first be assured that the benefits of this project will be realized and will justify the costs.

Then we must identify and understand the complex interrelations and dependencies between the overall Everglades restoration program and the IRL. Because the IRL is the first Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) project and will set many precedents, we need to establish the proper procedures and evaluation criteria to guide us through the many years and projects ahead.

You've been working on the report a number of years now, why doesn't the report include all of the information needed?

The IRL report is the first report to be prepared in what will be the long and extremely complicated process of restoring the Everglades under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program.

Because it is the first report, the Corps, the South Florida Water Management District and the entire study team are still in the process of determining exactly what information must be included in the report based on laws enacted since the report was first begun.

The causes of the delay in the completion of the report can be better explained by taking a closer look at the processes by which Everglades restoration has progressed. Here are a few of the major elements.

- In an effort to expedite restoration of the Indian River Lagoon South, Congress authorized a study and the IRL Feasibility Report was initiated in 1996 and conducted in an open and inclusive manner.
- In the Fall of 2000, Congress approved the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan in a law called the Water Resources Development Act of 2000 (WRDA 2000). Besides approval of CERP, WRDA 2000 also established other requirements that will govern Everglades restoration. These "Programmatic Regulations" address such important issues as how

water would be reserved for and delivered to the Everglades ecosystem and establish guidelines for future project formulation, evaluation and sequencing.

- At the time the IRL team was finishing the final IRL Feasibility Report, in the fall of 2002, the draft Programmatic Regulations were also being completed and were made available for public review and comment. The draft regulations, as with the IRL Report, were produced through an open and inclusive public process. While these regulations have not yet been finalized, all the players in CERP have agreed to the requirements in principle. With some slight modification, they will set the standards for reports and the analysis and information needed to make decisions in the future. However, the guidance for this analysis is still under development. The IRL report will be the first time it will be used.
- When the review of the Final IRL Report began, the requirements in the draft Programmatic Regulation were also considered. There were number of areas where the IRL report fell short of the requirements outlined in the new draft regulations. For example, consideration of the draft regulations brought to light questions that must be answered on how the proposed IRL project would fit in to the larger CERP. Questions such as, "Why build IRL at this point during the restoration program, rather than later," have been asked. The report also must address other provisions contained in WRDA such as identification of water to be reserved for the environment.

Did the fact that the recommended plan exceed the cost and scope of that included in the "Yellow Book," the CERP report of 1999, cause a delay?

It's important to remember that the "Yellow Book" was a concept of the overall Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. The recommendation of the IRL report does exceed the cost of the plan described in the original "Yellow Book" plan, but also includes additional features to address CERP-wide goals that were not included in the "Yellow Book." We always anticipated that there would be changes as the team developed the individual projects in more detail.

When will the report move forward?

The Corps is scheduled to finalize additional information and analysis by fall 2003 and then the report will undergo additional reviews. We know that this delay is disappointing for the many who have worked on the project and the members of the public but, we believe that the time invested in this first report will help resolve future concerns and lead to more efficient implementation of future CERP projects. Updates can be found on this web site. The Corps and its partners remain fully committed to Everglades restoration.